



John Muir Chapter

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Oppose SB 26, Bonding for Major Interstate Bridge Projects, Before the Assembly Transportation Committee, Tues, May 24, 2011 at 10:30 AM in 417 N, GAR

Thank you for accepting our comments today. The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter is made up of 15,000 members and supporters of the nation's oldest, grassroots environmental organization working to promote clean energy and protect water resources in Wisconsin.

The Sierra Club urges you to oppose SB 26. This bill removes the requirement for the state to receive \$75 million in federal support before accessing \$225 million in general obligation bonding authority for major interstate bridge projects. In particular, it will pave the way for a massive, blufftop-to-blufftop, freeway-style bridge that has been proposed across the Lower St. Croix, a federally-protected Wild and Scenic River. SB 26 will leave taxpayers on the hook for an expensive project that will lead to increased traffic and accelerate sprawl into rural western Wisconsin. This bill is not needed if we consider cost-effective alternatives that address traffic needs while allowing our natural resources to remain intact.

In 1972, the Lower St. Croix was designated as a National Scenic Riverway. For decades, residents of Wisconsin and Minnesota have enjoyed the beauty of the St. Croix River and the surrounding valley, and the high-quality boating, fishing and swimming opportunities it provides. This is only possible today because of the leadership of those who have come before us, who recognized that this great area should be protected for generations to come. SB 26 fosters irresponsible development that would compromise the scenic and environmental values for which Congress established the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. Last October, The National Park Service affirmed this interpretation when they announced that the proposed massive bridge would violate the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Over the years, the Sierra Club has advocated for more economically viable alternatives which protect the recreational resources and natural character of the Riverway. A new, smaller-scale bridge in Stillwater would potentially save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars while serving the needs of our area's growing population. In contrast, a \$700 million bridge that is only seven miles upriver from the existing eight-lane interstate 94 bridge doesn't make sense. SB 26 risks taxpayer dollars to fund a huge, unnecessary bridge project while ignoring more sensible alternatives, and that's why we're urging you to oppose this bill.